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ABSTRACT

Tests of English for foreign students conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (England) and the Educational Testing Service were recognized as equivalent, though different in form and approach, in the 1930s. The underlying goal of the Cambridge certificate of proficiency was control of the English curriculum of foreign schools. American tests were intended to plug a loophole in immigration law that allowed for visas outside the foreign student quota, and reliability was an important design criterion. The College Entrance Examination Board test prepared in 1927-30 reflects the contemporary state of the art in language testing. It consisted of: four one-paragraph passages, varied in difficulty and focus, with true-false questions; a longer passage focusing on ideas; a direct dictation and reproduction from memory of a dictated passage; an oral test; and a 250-300 word composition. In its first year, the test was administered to 30 candidates in 8 countries. Diminishing interest in studying in the United States during the Depression caused discontinuance. The Cambridge examinations, by contrast, were curriculum-oriented, modeled on a traditional native-speaker higher education syllabus, and did not incorporate psychometrics. They included sections on phonetics, English literature, and translation. Use expanded gradually but steadily, then declined during World War II. (MSE)

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Testing the English of foreign students in 1930

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The tests of English for foreign students conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations ~~Board~~ Syndicate and by the Educational Testing Service, Princeton, have come under recent scrutiny in a major comparative study conducted by Lyle Bachman and others. It is interesting to note that earlier versions of these examinations were recognized as equivalent in the 1930s; the New York State Department of Education was said to be willing to recognize the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate Certificate of Proficiency in English or the College Board's English Examination (EETCS) as proof of English proficiency for Jewish doctors and lawyers seeking to escape persecution in Nazi Germany.

Even in the 1930s, the examinations on each side of the Atlantic Ocean were different in form and approach. The Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency examinations dated from 1913, and were considered innovative and almost non-academic in their desire to test language use rather than knowledge about language. Nonetheless, they remained untouched by the concern for psychometric reliability that had come to permeate American language testing after the end of the first world war. Their underlying goal seemed to be control of the curriculum of selected foreign schools teaching English; they were thus part of the linguistic imperialism that Phillipson (1992) has described.

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The American tests of English for foreign students, on the other hand, were intended to plug a loophole in the 1924 Immigration Act which allowed for visas outside the quotas for foreign students. Influenced by Carl Brigham, the College Entrance Examination Board was already learning to eschew curricular control in favor of reliability, and the examinations included a number of new-type true-false questions alongside open-ended integrative items.

The College Board Examination to Test Competence in the English Language

The English Competence examination prepared by the College Entrance Examination Board in 1930, probably the earliest test intended specifically for English as a second language in the United States, provides a good view of the state of the art in American language testing. [Saretsky, 1984 #1276][1] Indirectly, psychometrics had a part in creating the need for the test, which was intended to deal with a provision of the Immigration Act of 1924, the passage of which had been influenced by the evidence of eugenicists and psychometrists like Carl Brigham on the deleterious effects of permitting non-Nordic immigrants to contaminate the American gene pool. The Act permitted granting special visas to any foreign alien whose only purpose was to study in the United States at a school, college or university approved by the Secretary of Labor. On receipt of a certificate of admission from such an institution, the local

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[1]After preparing an account of this test on the basis of published material, I was pleased to come across a short history of the test by the archivist of the Educational Testing Service, Gary D. Saretzky.

American Consul was empowered to issue a student visa. The loophole was quickly spotted, and the number of foreign applicants seeking admission to US institutions grew rapidly. In 1926, the Commissioner General of Immigration wrote in a memorandum that:

> "The experience of the bureau in the past two and one-half years is to the effect that many non-quota immigrant students gain admission to the United States totally unfit, because of insufficient knowledge of the English language.... THEREFORE, IT IS REQUESTED THAT ALL SCHOOLS INDICATE IN THE CERTIFICATE OF ADMISSION THE EXACT KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE A STUDENT MUST HAVE BEFORE HE CAN BE ACCEPTED."[2]

As a result, a number of requests were made to the College Board for a test to measure their knowledge of English. [College Entrance Examination Board, 1929 #1085] These were formalized when in December 1927, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars adopted the following resolution:

> Whereas, it is required that a certificate of admission be furnished to a non-quota immigrant student prior to his admission to the United States, and difficulties have arisen both in defining the exact knowledge of the English language required for admission and in determining the ability of the student in this respect,

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[2]Excerpt included in the file of English Examination for Foreign Students, Educational Testing Service archives.

> Be it resolved that the American Association of Collegiate Registrars request the College Entrance Examination Board to consider the addition to their service of a special examination designed to test the ability of a foreign student in such use of the English language as is required for attendance by an American collegiate institutions, and to offer this examination to prospective foreign students in connection with their regular June examination.

In April 1928, the Board set up a commission [3] which reported seven months later that it would be desirable to have an examination to test "ability to understand written English, to read English intelligibly, to understand spoken English, and to express his thoughts intelligibly in spoken English." The aural comprehension test should include "simple English prose read slowly" and "simple directions given conversationally." The report suggested that Instructors in English Departments were not the best qualified to

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[3]The commission was chaired by Professor Adam Leroy Jones, (director of admissions at Columbia University), and consisted of Dr Claude Fuess (English instructor at the Phillips Academy, J. Wilson Hobbs (English junior master at the Boston Public Latin School), Ralph Minor (university examiner with the University of California), Dr Kenneth Murdock (assistant professor of English at Harvard University), David Robertson (assistant director of the American Council of Education) , Ira Smith (registrar of the University of Michigan), and Edwin Stevens, (registrar of the University of Washington).

develop a test, because of their concern with correct grammar. New type tests might be suitable. The test should include passages of varying difficulty and "with different subject matters;" the report should break down the results by section. Such an examination was "financially feasible" but the candidates should bear its full cost.

A second commission, appointed to plan the examination, [4] at first assumed that half the test would be oral-aural. A 1928 memorandum by the commission assumed four parts, of equal weight: reading of college material, writing of college reports, understanding lectures and class discussions, and speaking well enough to take part in class discussions. In April 1929, the committee presented a detailed outline to the Board, which received a grant of $5000 from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to cover the costs. The specification of the examination were as follows:

1. Four one-paragraph passages (about 150 words each); one of them narrative and simple, a second historical or topical or journalistic and more difficult, a third "of some critical weight on a matter of specific social import" and a fourth of scientific prose. The questions should be quite

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[4] The membership of the second commission differed from the first in that Hobbs, Minor, Smith and Stevens were replaced by Professor Jack Crawford (Yale University), Professor Sophie Hart (Wellesley College), Professor Ada Snell (Mount Holyoke College) and Professor Harrison Steeves (Columbia University), making it thus an essentially academic committee.

straightforward, and could be answered with plus or minus (true-false) answers.

2. A longer passage (about 400 words) perhaps from Mill or Lowell, dealing with "debatable or conditioned ideas," the questions to look for capacity to "isolate salient ideas, and to deal critically with hypothetical and adversative statements and the like."

3. A direct dictation, and the reproduction from memory of a dictated passage.

4. An oral test, with ten topics prepared for the examiner. The examiner was to report, using a three point scale for each (proficient, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory), on "fluency, responsiveness, rapidity, articulation, enunciation, command of construction, of connectives, usable vocabulary and the use of idiom; examiners should also report if the candidate appeared "diffident or shy."

5. A 250-300 word composition to be written on a selected topic.

Time should be given for revision; reports should be given for each part of the examination. The commission believed that the main value of the examination would be its diagnostic accuracy. "It is important to know the candidate's strength or weakness in knowledge of words, command of English construction, and grasp of the logic and continuity of English speech." There was no point in giving absolute percentage grades, but rather percentile standing by country. This was believed to be especially important for students whose language differed greatly from English, like Chinese or Japanese.

Formal tests of spelling, grammar would give little evidence of the ability of a foreigner to carry on American college work. The reading passages of varying difficulties might show that candidates who did no express themselves with facility might still be fitted for certain work, for instance at the graduate level. Therefore, it was thought advisable for the examination papers to be sent directly to the colleges.

Preparing the the first examination scheduled for April 1930 examination was not easy, and "no little correspondence was necessary in order to secure the services of suitable persons in the administration and supervision of the examination." [College Entrance Examination Board, 1930 #1198]:8. Finally, help was received from a number of American ambassadors and consuls. Thirty candidates took the examination, which was judged to be "very carefully prepared and especially well planned" in 1930, and the work of most of them was said to have been "very creditable." Seven candidates were examined in China, eight in Belgium, four in each of Poland and Italy, three in Hungary, two in Germany, and one in each of Beirut and France. Six were women. Five candidates planned to go to Columbia University, three to each of Harvard, Stanford and Michigan.

In the second year, 1931, the fee was $10 and 139 candidates were examined in seventeen countries. The largest group (82) was in Moscow, where engineering students were required by the Soviet Government to take the examination. [College Entrance Examination Board, 1931 #1059] The secretary of the American-Russian Chamber of Commerce, Spencer Williams, supervised the Moscow administration, with three assistants to help with the oral interview

Williams reported that he had enjoyed the experience though it had been hard work. The candidates represented that "new class of technicians rising up for the proletariat" and had been spending twelve hours a day for five months to learn English. [Saretsky, 1984 #1276]:3 The average for all candidates for the oral test was 85%, for the reading 77%, for the composition 56%. and for the dictation 47%. In 1932, the test was offered in 29 countries, but as a result of the world wide depression, only 30 candidates offered themselves at twelve centers.

At the suggestion of the 1932 examiners, another commission[5] was set up to revise the examination. It proposed the use of "indeterminate" as well as true-false items and wanted to give broad classifications rather than scores, and to continue the stress on spoken English. A new description was approved for the 1933 examination. [College Entrance Examination Board, 1932 #1199]. Part 1 was changed to consist of several passages with about 30 true-false and other questions testing understanding. For the second dictation, was allowed to take notes. The oral test was to be based on "ten or fifteen minutes of discussion or conversation." The revised examination showed the acceptance of the need for reliable items, but not at the cost of more face valid assessment of what Carroll (1961) later called integrative skills.

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[5]It consisted of Professors Jones, Hansford, Snell and Steeves, joined by the associate secretary of the Board, Professor Carl Brigham of Princeton University.

In any event, the examination did not survive the economic situation as the numbers of candidates continued to fall. In 1933, 17 candidates took the examination; in 1934, 20. [College Entrance Examination Board, 1934 #1061] The Secretary of the Board had written once again to colleges asking if the examination should be continued. In 1935, the funds were exhausted.[College Entrance Examination Board, 1935 #1062] In fact, the 1935 report admitted, the 1933 questions had been carefully guarded and used again in 1934 and 1935, but as they could not be used again, the examination was "at least temporarily" discontinued It was hoped that conditions would improve, but in fact they did not.

In 1938, a Dr Heinrich Selver called the Board to ask about the English Examination. A school he had been associated with in Berlin offered courses in English for adults for German Jewish doctors and lawyers seeking to emigrate. the New York State Department of Education would recognize the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate Certificate of Proficiency in English or the College Board's English Examination (EETCS). As many of them wanted to come to the US, the American examination seemed more appropriate. He was told that it was no longer being given. It was not until after the war that interest in the test was rekindled.

This account of the first American institutional test in English for foreign students prefigures in miniature the development of TOEFL. Some of the features that stand out in hindsight are the dependence on Foundation support (provided to start up the examination but lacking at the critical point), the intelligence and wisdom of the original examination proposal, tempered by practical and institutional

reality, and the slowness of users to see the value of the test. The examination responded cautiously to the mounting pressure to including objective items in standardized examinations. This was in marked contrast to the testing of foreign students of English conducted by the University of Cambridge; another major difference between the American and the English test is that the former was (of necessity) quite curriculum-free and seen first and foremost as a proficiency examination.

It is relevant to note that the purpose of this test was in fact political and restrictive; its task was to enforce an immigration act whose purpose was to reverse the earlier American openness. It was provided by a well-established testing agency in response to government request. Its ultimate ineffectiveness resulted not form any formal opposition, but to an unwillingness of government or foundations or prospective users to pay for what they thought was needed.

The Cambridge Examinations in English for Foreigners

The notion of reliability was much less influential in England than on the other side of the Atlantic. In spite of Cyril Burt's early support for the objective achievement test [Burt, 1921 #973] and the continuing growing acceptance of intelligence testing, traditional examining in England remained virtually uncontaminated by psychometric notions. This may be seen from the contemporary forms of the Cambridge tests in English for foreigners.

Testing of the English of foreigners started much earlier in England than in America. In fact, the University of Cambridge became

involved in overseas testing within a few years of starting the Local Examinations, when in 1862, there was an inquiry from Trinidad to Cambridge. The first papers were sent out ("in sealed parcels to the Governor through the Colonial Office") in 1863, and ten candidates were examined. (Roach, 1971:146) Cambridge continued to develop its overseas examinations, and by 1898, Cambridge had 36 colonial centers and 1220 colonial candidates. (Roach, 1971:145). Its formal entry in testing the English of foreigners was not until 1913, when it instituted the examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English, meant to be for "foreign students who sought proof of their practical knowledge of the language 'with a view to teaching it' in foreign schools."[Roach, 1945 #360]:34. Reflecting the growing interest in direct method teaching, which required of teachers "reliable command of the language for active classroom use" rather than academic or descriptive ability, it was however modeled on the traditional native speaker language syllabus, with the essay as the key feature. As well as a paper in Phonetics, there was a literature paper on a period studied in advanced classes in English secondary schools (Roach 1945:34). Another paper involved translation: the two languages regularly offered were French and German.

The examination was small to start with, and offered only at one center, London, it "teetered along" with about 15 candidates a year. There was probably a pause in the activities of the certificate during the War, and its growth came after 1925 when John Roach first became involved. In 1925, John Roach was appointed Additional Assistant Secretary to the Syndicate, just before he took his second Tripos and qualified for a degree in French and German. Roach, after

studying classics at school, had served as a professional soldier in the Indian Army from 1917 until 1922, with war-time service in the Middle East. At first, Nalder Williams, a Classicist, who was Secretary of the Syndicate, and Roach handled the final decisions on the award of grades for the English examination, "a hole-in-corner affair of fifteen minutes." [Roach, 1983 #1186]:5. In fact, Williams had charge of examining in English; Roach's area was "modern languages, geography and oddments" and as he later remarked, "it was not then realized that English was, for foreign candidates, a 'modern' language." The examination remaining so small, there may well have been discussions, Roach recollected, of closing it, but instead, full responsibility was handed to Roach, who prophesied that he would spread the examination round the world in ten years. By 1939, he later triumphantly noted, it was being offered in 30 countries.

The growth and development of the examination was slow but steady. In 1926, translation papers were offered as a matter of course in Italian and Spanish as well as French and German. In 1930, a special literature paper for foreign students was written. In 1932, the Phonetics paper was dropped, and centers other than London were added, with the result that the numbers of candidates started to rise rapidly.

Table 1. Candidates for the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (Roach 1945:34)

1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
15	33	66	140	202	278	412	675	752

In 1935, the examination was offered in December as well as in July, and there were centers at Cambridge, London, Edinburgh and Rome. In 1936, a paper in Economic and Commercial Knowledge[6] was an alternative to the English Literature paper, and three levels of pass, Special Mention, Good, and Pass, were instituted. In 1935, the Board of Education gave official recognition to the examination. In 1936, it was offered at Rome, Naples, Hamburg, Paris and Holland, Sweden and Switzerland. In 1934, Roach [Roach, 1934 #1194] had proposed extending the notion of a Certificate of Proficiency by reintroducing (they had been offered from 1917-1922) examinations in languages other than English; he suggested such certificates in French, German, Spanish and Italian.. There was opposition from the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education who thought that existing examinations offered by the London Chamber of Commerce and the Royal Society of Arts covered the area fully. Roach later called for national tests in foreign languages [Roach, 1977 #1196].

The certificate received a major boost when in 1937 the University of Cambridge recognized it as "the equivalent of the standard of English required of all students, British or foreign, before entrance to the University." More and more centers were opened,[7]

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[6]This syllabus was to written in consultation with the Head of the Day Department at the City of London College. [Roach, 1934 #1194]

[7] In 1937, centers listed included Dublin, Paris, Berlin, Marburg, Hamburg, Florence, Rome, Naples, Milan, Hilversum, Lausanne, Basle, Malmö, Helsinki, Budapest, Belgrade, Zagreb, Lyubljana, Sarejevo,

and translation papers offered for more and more languages.[8]. A new alternative to English Literature in 1938 was English Life and Institutions. The examination was offered five times in the year.

With the grcwing demand for certification in English, Roach proposed the introduction of a new Lower Certificate of English. The newly established British Council, Roach (1983:6) later recalled, opposed this development, and sent a Colonel Sullivan to see him at ~~Oxford~~ Cambridge; Roach was taken by Sullivan to Corpus Christi College, where Spens, "arch bully and puller of wires" and probably a member of the British Council, attempted to browbeat him. Spens "had the guns" in England, as he was chairman of the School Council;[9] but Roach had support, he was sure, in the Foreign Office. He decided to continue with his plans for the Lower Certificate, but introduce it only at overseas centers, which he did in 1939. In 1943, it was also given at home centers for members of the Allied Forces. The Lower Certificate examination in June 1939 consisted of a dictation, a two-hour English composition and language paper, and a two hour literature paper.

Vienna, Gdynia, Warsaw, Bucharest, Athens, Smyrna, Rabat, Beirut, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Shanghai, Oslo, Stockholm, Amiens, Bordeaux and Dakar.

8 By 1938, translation papers were regularly set in Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish and Swedish, and other languages were available on request

9When Roach came in, Spens was just signing the famous Spens report on British education.

Candidates were required to write a letter of between 80 and 100 words; there were three alternative topics, the first being as follows:

> A letter of thanks for a present you have been given on your birthday. Say what other presents you were given and what you did that day.

There were also three topics offered for the required 250-300 word composition; one involved a narrative account of teaching a younger brother or sister to ride a bicycle, a second was a detailed description of a picture hanging in a house or a school, and the third was a description of what the candidate saw while waiting at a railway station for a missed train. This was followed by a short narrative; candidates were asked to give it a title, demonstrate knowledge of the meaning of six out of twelve underlined words, write a four sentence summary of the main points of the story, and rewrite in good English some sentences in Aboriginal pidgin in the story. The literature questions (two out of four had to be chosen) were based on the prescribed texts, which were *A Tale of Two Cities, The Oxford English Course: Reading Book Four, Gulliver in Lilliput,* and *Arms and the Man.* There was also an oral examination.

Just before the outbreak of World War II, then, the Cambridge English examinations reached a high point, with centers in 24 overseas countries (Germany was omitted at the last minute) and twenty regular centers in Britain. In the last months before the War, Roach made visits to Belgium, Italy, France and Switzerland to establish new centers.

The close connection between English teaching and testing and the Foreign Office may be illustrated by a side-note on that trip by

Roach ([Roach, 1989 #1193]): "Perhaps the most remarkable thing I wrote was a report that I wrote in French (it had been requested by the French Intelligence in Paris) on Mussolini's Italy. I wrote it in one evening at the end of a ten-day tour of Italy on the Syndicate's business at Christmas 1939, Italy still being semi-neutral. Professor Deseeignet of Reading said, 'The style is extremely good. It should be published at once.' Certainly not! Had I published, every Intelligence Service, including our own, would have said, 'He talks." All that I gathered in Italian (and in German from Polish refugees in my hotel) I transmuted that evening in French. It caused a stir in the French Intelligence, our Embassy in Paris, the Foreign Office. That was enough." The original report is in the library of Magdalene College.

With the War, there was a rapid decline, as so many foreign centers became inaccessible.[10]

In the development of the Cambridge test, the issue of reliability that Edgeworth had raised in 1888 continued to be of only occasional interest, and the examinations remained untouched by psychometric

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[10]While inaccessible, the examinations appear to have been continued underground in enemy occupied territory. Roach [Roach, 1983 #1186] listed several such cases: Sister Pauline who kept them going in Italy and sent in the scripts after the war for validation and the award of certificates, Mrs. Stansfield-Popovic of Belgrade who took the examinations into Civilian Internment Camp and forwarded the scripts through the Red Cross, and a nun in Brussels who continued the examinations in her convent "under the noses" of an occupying German unit.

notions. One can see this by comparing the 1931 College Board's examination, with its true-false questions, its concentration on language, and its lack of curricular concern, with the forms of the Cambridge papers described above, with their emphasis on curriculum, their inclusion of literature, and their absolute reliance on subjective grading. The Cambridge examiners continued until quite recently to be more concerned about what to test (i.e., about curriculum) than about how to test it.

But there were some people in England unhappy with this established view. Valentine[Valentine, 1932 #988] summarized several years of research into the reliability of various English examinations. Like Latham, he was disturbed by the "cramping" effect of examination syllabuses, but even more important for him was Edgeworth's questioning of their reliability. The most patent causes of unreliability were luck in being asked the right questions and "adventitious variation" in the state of the candidate at the time of the examination. A second major sources was the instability of essay marking and the variability in and among examiners.Valentine found very little relation between the way students were ordered on entrance exams and their school certificate examination results five years later. He remarked on the tendency to teach those things most easily examined: thus, composition in a foreign language, though less important than reading, made for easier discrimination and was more likely to be examined. In spite of his and other studies, English practice continued to resist applying Edgeworth's findings.